THE RIVER

MACKAY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

CLIVE MOORE

WITH A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY ON THE PIONEER RIVER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BY MARION HEALY

Mackay Historical Society and Museum Inc.

Published by the Mackay Historical Society and Museum Inc.

P.O. Box 1349, Mackay Qld 4740, Australia

Email: mackayhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Creator: Moore, Clive, 1951 – author

Title: The River: Mackay in the Nineteenth Century

Clive Moore, with a photographic essay by Marion Healy

Subjects:

Mackay – History
Pioneer Valley – History
Pastoralism – History
Sugar Industry – History
First Nations Australians – History
Australian South Sea Islanders – History

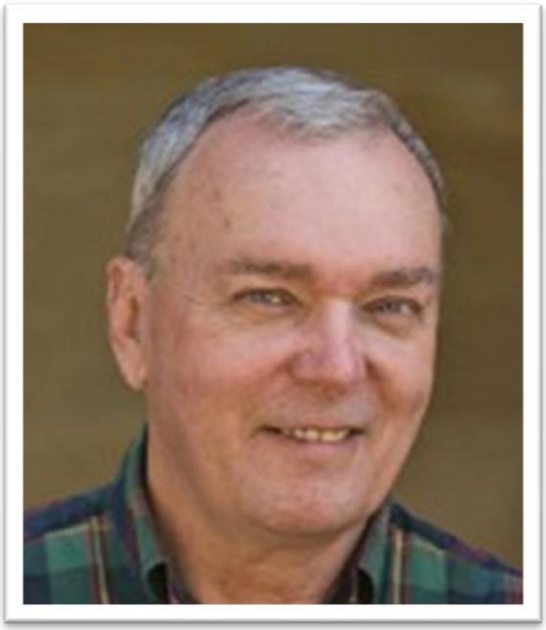
This book is dedicated to my closest interviewee links to the plantation era: Karl Ungerer (born in 1875), Eva Marian Black (born in 1881), William Bargo Tonga (born in 1885), Alfred Ungerer (born in 1888), my great uncle George Albert Milton (born in 1891), Cecilia Tarryango (born in 1900), Ivy Thomas (born in 1905), and Cedric Andrew (born in 1911). I also wish to acknowledge my parents Frederick Arthur (Digger) Moore (born in Rockhampton in 1920) and Elsie Frances Moore (born in Perth in 1919).

CONTENTS

The River: Mackay in the Nineteenth Century

The People who made this book:

The author of the text.



Clive Moore was born in Mackay in 1951 and graduated from James Cook University with an Honours degree in history in 1973, the thesis for which was entitled ‘The Transformation of the Mackay Sugar Industry. His 1981 PhD thesis, also from James Cook University, was entitled ‘Kanaka Maratta: A History of Melanesian Mackay’.

He is now a Professor Emeritus at the University of Queensland, where he worked for 28 years, retiring in 2015 as McCaughey Professor of Pacific and Australian history. In 2005, he received a Cross of Solomon Islands for historical work on Malaita Island. He was inaugural president of the Australian Association for Pacific Studies (2006–10) and was made a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities in 2010. He received an Outstanding Alumni Award from James Cook University in 2012, and the John Douglas Kerr Medal of Distinction, awarded by The Royal Historical Society of Queensland and the Professional Historians Association (Queensland) in 2015.

He has published extensively on Mackay and Australian South Sea Islanders, New Guinea and Solomon Islands, and Australian masculinity and sexuality. In 1985, he published *Kanaka: A History of Melanesian Mackay*. His recent major publications are *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopaedia, 1893–1978* (2013) and *Making Mala: Malaita in Solomon Islands, 1870s–1930s* (2017), *Tulagi: British Outpost of Empire* (2019), and *Honiara: Village-City of Solomon Islands* (2022).

The author of the photographic essay on the Pioneer River.

Marion F. Healy (née Fatnowna), is married to Kevin Healy and is the mother of Bevan and partner Hayley Bracken, daughters Imogen, Dominique and partner Thomas Jacklin, Rhiannon and partner Daniel Boyd, and Siobhan.

Marion has worked for many years in Education, creating spaces for the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander Queensland communities. She worked for Indigenous Community Volunteers Central QLD to Far North QLD visiting Indigenous communities, was employed by Mackay Regional Council as the Community Action for a Multicultural Society (CAMS) Officer and was involved in establishing the Queensland United Australian South Sea Islander Council.

Currently, she is employed as the cultural and historical adviser on the recently released Stan programme 'Black Snow' for Goal Post Productions, part of a Cold Case Murder Mystery series, about an Australian South Sea Islander young teenage girl murdered in North Queensland in 1994.

In 2013, she established Mer Bar Wakai Consultancy to deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cross Cultural Awareness, Australian South Sea Islander Cultural Awareness, and the Mackay Local History programme 'Who am I and Who are you', with a focus on the impact of the South Sea Islander people on the Sugar Industry. The consultancy has developed Professional Development Workshops and District Tours.

'Education thru the voices of many' is Marion's passion, and she thanks Clive Moore for the opportunity to connect and share.

INTRODUCTION

This is a 2024 revised edition of a book completed in 2022 and placed online in 2023. I was born in Mackay in 1951, which is the primary reason for writing this book. It's a return to my roots and to my beginnings as an historian. Back in 1973, I wrote my Honours thesis on the transformation of the Mackay sugar industry from a plantation to a central mill base, and in 1981 I completed my doctoral thesis on Melanesian immigration to the Mackay district, particularly from Malaita Island in the Solomon Islands. Since then, I have published many items on Australian South Sea Islanders—often Mackay-based—and have ventured into other areas of historical research and writing. But Mackay has always drawn me back.

And perhaps right now is the best place to deal with the pronunciation of 'Mackay'. According to the Mackay family, the correct pronunciation rhymes with 'sky'. Pronouncing the name 'Mac-KAY' was regarded as an abomination by the founding settler, John Mackay.

Mackay is a major North Queensland coastal city on the Pioneer River. With a population of about 123,000, the area of the Mackay Regional Council stretches from Cape Palmerston and the beaches south of Sarina (called Plane Creek until 1907), north to Bloomsbury, Midge Point and Laguna Keys, and west to Clarke Range, including the edge of the Eungella Plateau, together with the small towns of Eungella and Crediton. The city of Mackay—once known as 'Sugaropolis', and now as 'Sugar City'—is home to 80,000 residents. The district produces more than one-third of Australia's cane sugar. The core of the area is the valley of the Pioneer River. I have called this book *The River*, an acknowledgement of the centrality of the Pioneer River. It flows through the valley and through the history of the district.

This book is primarily about the history of the Pioneer Valley in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the urban settlement that became Mackay. The Pioneer River rises in the Pinnacle Ranges below Mt McBryde near Pinevale, flowing north and then east to the coast. Its catchment area includes 1,550 square kilometres. The main tributaries are Cattle and Blacks creeks. At its mouth the Pioneer is wide but shallow, blocked by sand bars with narrow passages between. Dredging and rock walls have created permanent channels. The old wags of Mackay used to say that it was the only Australian river that could host boat races in the morning and horse races in the afternoon. On 'King' tides, in late January and into February the range is 6.4 metres (21 feet). Too shallow to berth large vessels, ships anchored at Flat Top Island off the river mouth and passengers and goods were lightered to and from the shore, until an artificial harbour was built on the nearby coast in the 1930s. The ocean off the beaches just south of Mackay is also very shallow, exposing kilometres of sand when the tide retreats. Marion Healy's photographic essay on the river is at the end of this Introduction.

During floods, the river and its creeks transport large quantities of medium to coarse sand down to the coast, distributing rich alluvial soil over the flood plains. In recent decades, weirs at Mirani, Marian and Dumbleton, and since 1977 diversion of water from the Pioneer River into Kinchant Dam (between Mirani and Eton on the upper reaches of Sandy Creek), as well as into Teemburra Dam, constructed in 1997 (at Pinnacle, south of Finch Hatton and west of Mia Mia), have moderated the effect of floods. Each year, cyclones begin in the Coral and Solomon seas, then collide with or travel along the north Australian coast. Every few decades they hit with intensity, causing major destruction. East coast lows also dump heavy

rain. Associated storm surges can cause devastation.

After the pictorial tribute to the Pioneer River, *The River* proceeds through 14 chapters and a bibliography. The first chapter is a re-creation of the lives of the Aboriginal people of the valley before Europeans arrived in the 1860s. The second chapter covers a much wider area, including the mountains and plains at the back of the valley, providing context for the pastoral settlement that took place in the 1850s and 1860s. The chapter connects the valley to its hinterland. The third chapter is centred on John Mackay, an explorer and failed pastoralist, the first settler to take up a lease in the valley. Along with an assessment of his life, I have used the chapter to provide background for early pastoral settlement in the valley before sugarcane became the dominant economic force, and to introduce 'the people trade'—the labour trade to Melanesia, the descendants from which mark modern Mackay as a unique community. Chapter 4 extends discussion of the economics of early pastoralism in the valley and close by. Chapter 5 looks at domestic life on these pastoral stations. Chapter 6 returns to the First Nations Australians theme with which the book began, concentrating on the sad destruction of the bulk of the Indigenous population, and on the 1870s and 1880s experiments, ultimately unsuccessful, to encourage a more settled way of life. Chapters 7 and 8 are centred on the sugar industry that came to dominate the valley and altered the environment. The industry began based on plantations operating their own mills. Chapter 9 covers the lives of the main nineteenth century workforce, Pacific Islanders, then known as 'Kanakas', and today as Australian South Sea Islanders. Chapter 10 concentrates on the government-sponsored milling co-operatives run by farmers, which replaced the private plantations and mills. Chapters 11 and 12 examine Melanesian society in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The concluding two chapters concentrate on the development of Mackay, positioning the town in the wider district, as well as the colony and now state.

Writing the history of the region

Brought up in Mackay, I was a student at Victoria Park Primary School and Mackay State High School ('Milton Street'). I must admit to a fondness for the place. Yet, as an historian of Australia and the Pacific, my perspective is much wider. I seek context and explanation drawn from the nineteenth century history of the entire north of Australia and its neighbouring islands around the Coral and Solomon seas. I also prefer a *longue durée* (long term) approach, which is unavoidable with Chapter 1 on the First Nations Australians. The same applies in the emphasis on pastoralism in Chapters 2 to 5, a necessary precursor to the development of the valley as a premier sugarcane-growing district.

Henry Ling Roth wrote the first history of Mackay, published in 1908. He was a participant-observer during the 1870s and 1880s. Mackay has produced four major historians, all from Mackay State High School. During the 1980s and 1990s, John Kerr wrote many commissioned histories, including a history of the Pioneer Shire Council, and histories of Racecourse, Cattle Creek, and Proserpine mills. Kett Kennedy became a professor at James Cook University, in 2003 publishing a history of the Mackay City Council. I became a professor at the University of Queensland, writing about Mackay over fifty years. Lyall Ford, after a lifetime as an engineer, wrote nine books: histories of his family, and of the main road networks in the Mackay district and North Queensland. Each in our own way, we returned historical knowledge to the district. Other authors are mentioned throughout the text.

Over the years since I left Mackay in 1970 to attend university, there have been numerous local history books written about the district, many of which are noted in my

bibliography, all of which have assisted in writing this book. Glen Hall's excellent website (www.mackayhistory.org) provides detailed information on a range of topics. There are several active historical societies in the district, particularly the Mackay Historical Society, and the Mackay Family History Society. Over several decades, I have benefitted from the advice of other knowledgeable local historians, such as John Williams, Ken Manning, Rod Manning (editor of *The Daily Mercury*, 1980–97), Bernice Wright, Terry Hayes, and Noel Fatnowna. When I began my historical research in the 1970s—using hand-written notes, typewriters, and primitive photocopy machines—computers were inaccessible huge machines which used punch cards. Since then, desktop and laptop computers have revolutionised the process, and the details now available to researchers through the internet have exponentially changed the nature of historical research and writing. During the 1970s, John Kerr and I individually spent several months in the State Archives using the original documents, and often also had access to original newspapers, or we used microfilm copies. These days most access is digital. However, I still use the seven metres of filing cards I gathered as a doctoral student, and can locate detailed information, some of which remains unknown to other researchers.

Many people have assisted with this book, not least, and rather unknowingly, members of my family who over decades answered questions about the early years. One of my most useful historical assets is newspaper cuttings gathered from several sources, some of which date back to the 1960s. My mother collected many of these for me. The *Mackay Mercury* was an exceptional newspaper that always championed local history. These historical articles and letters to the editor, and the many commercial and historical supplements, were very useful in writing Chapters 13 and 14, and as a reference source throughout the book.

The late Graham Mooney helped me understand the history of his people, the Yuwi—the Indigenous people of the valley—allowing me to tap into his extensive knowledge for Chapters 1 and 6. He read and approved drafts before his untimely death in 2020 and supported the inclusion of photographs of his people. Thanks, are also due to Jonathan Richards for providing some of the Native Police photographs from other areas of Queensland. In preparing Chapter 1, I have also benefitted from the advice of archaeologists Bryce Barker, Ian Lilley, Mike Rowland, and anthropologist Daniel Leo.

Historian Deirdre Morrish of Yeppoon was generous in sharing her knowledge of pastoral and colonial families, particularly the Macartneys and the Rawsons. The pastoral chapters in the first half of the book are much better after her assistance to a 'city-slicker' historian.

Since the 1970s, many members of the Australian South Sea Islander community have provided information and advice on their history in the district. One of them, Noel Fatnowna, was an historian in his own right, publishing *Fragments of a Lost Heritage* (1989). He worked for decades as an ambulance paramedic, and assisted with fund raising, which took him to every farm and pastoral property in the district. Noel's local knowledge was encyclopaedic. His nephew Clacy Fatnowna has followed in his uncle's footsteps and has provided help with aspects of Mackay district history and South Sea Islander history. I would also like to thank Christine Andrew for her book about her father Cedric and the Mackay Islander community, and Teresa Fatnowna for her book about the Fatnowna family.

Isobel Wallace helped locate details about Leadhills village in Scotland, home of the Martin family from Hamilton pastoral station. Gary Cranitch's photographs of the Pioneer Valley and Eungella are magnificent and I thank the Queensland Museum for allowing me to use them. Key maps were prepared by Vincent Verheyen, a long-term friend and collaborator,

whose cartography has improved the quality of my last four books. One key map was provided by John Frith of Flat Earth Mapping. The origins of all plates, maps and graphs are acknowledged in the sources. I sincerely thank everyone who helped put them together. I could never have done it alone.

What I have attempted to do in this book is create an overview of the second half of the nineteenth century—the crucial decades for the formation of the settler society which developed. On occasions I extend into the early twentieth century. The book is divided into three sections, for balance, and as an attempt to position chapters in the most logical order. The First Nations and Islander chapters are dispersed between the others, an indication of the interconnections.

I have approached all this in ways that are a little unusual. No other historian of the Mackay district has ever provided such an extensive Indigenous context. I have tried to indicate the great time depth involved in First Nations Australian history, and environmental changes as the original coast was inundated, an acknowledgement that human settlement in the valley and its surrounds began tens of thousands of years ago. My training as a Pacific historian made this second nature to me, and, importantly, it fills a gap in our knowledge of the region. My historical training began at James Cook University in the 1970s, where Henry Reynolds and Noel Loos and others were exploring 'the other side of the frontier'. My oral history work with Australian South Sea Islanders came out of this 'frontier' project. Given my long relationship with the Islander community, I have been able to write extensively on their history. Between 1981 and 1987 I taught at the University of Papua New Guinea. On my return, to the University of Queensland in Brisbane, two of the first papers I published were on the Indigenous side of the colonial frontier at Mackay. The dearth of historical material on First Nations Australians at Mackay is a telling anomaly in the history of the district. It is as if they hardly existed, when in fact they have been consciously erased from history. Chapters 1 and 6 are dedicated to the Indigenous inhabitants.

As well, there are four chapters primarily on the pastoral era which led to the settlement of the Pioneer Valley, taking a broad approach, both geographically and historically between the 1850s and 1900s. No other history of the region has provided as large a pastoral context. Strangely, there is a gap in our knowledge of Queensland pastoralism, between the research of Lorna McDonald in the Port Curtis and southern Leichhardt districts, and Anne Allingham's research in the North Kennedy district. I have filled in this lacuna for the South Kennedy district, which includes the Pioneer Valley, and also for the north of the Leichhardt district, which includes Nebo and its surrounds. The pastoral section deals with the beginnings of a privileged ruling class which in the early decades controlled the land and the economy. Pastoralism also connects strongly to the sugar plantation elite and to urban power, far more so than previous histories of the region have ever stressed. Many individuals first mentioned in the pastoral chapters reappear in the later chapters, showing the links between pastoralism, the sugar industry, and urban life on the colonial frontier. These chapters balance the final eight chapters on agricultural settlement, the South Sea Islander labour force, and the growth of the town of Mackay.

I was curious to explore the origins of these early colonists, and what life was like at a domestic level, which is too often neglected. I have used some techniques from new social history—history from below—to provide new perspectives on the finances of pastoralism and the sugar industry, and of domestic life and the lives of women on pastoral stations, plantations and farms. I have included around 480 photographs in the book, most of which

come from the excellent digital collection of the State Library of Queensland. There are photographic essays on the river, pastoral life, the sugar industry, Pacific Islanders, and urban Mackay. Almost 60 historical maps, tables, graphs, and plans have been used to illustrate the history. While hardcopy publishers usually cut back on extravagant visual content, there is no reason why a digital book like this one should hold back on this important aspect of historical presentation. A visual history emerges to parallel the written text. Because of the digital nature of the book and presuming that many viewers will read individual chapters rather than the whole book, occasionally I have allowed a small amount of repetition to make each chapter a more complete item.

When it seems useful, I do not shy away from personal involvement in the text. There is something very secure about returning to home territory after so many decades away. While best known as an historian of the Pacific, in fact I always had one foot back on the Australian mainland and have never ceased being interested in the history of the Pioneer Valley and its surrounds. My direct knowledge of the area now spans 70 years (just). In the 1970s, I collected oral testimony that reached back to the 1880s. I interviewed older residents of European, Islander, and Malay origins. The timing was propitious: I was young and keen and some of the children of the original settlers were still alive. They wanted to have their memories recorded. My oldest interviewee was Eva Black, born in 1881, daughter of Mackay merchant Frederick Holmes Mardan Black, and niece of planter and politician Maurice Hume Black. My interviews with South Sea Islanders were carried out between 1973 and 1981, in collaboration with Patricia Mercer. They are the largest collection of recorded oral testimony from the Australian South Sea Islander community. My constant interest in the history of the district's Islanders has helped sustain my interest in Mackay. When I mention rivers, creeks, mountains, beaches, sub-districts, a town, or a street, etc., there is a strong likelihood that I have known the location well over several decades. The local knowledge helps, and I have chosen to involve myself personally in some sections of the book, an acknowledgement that historical writing should not be remote and needs to include the present-day. In a small way it is an explanation of my background as an historian. This informs the text but also places me into context as an historian of wider Australia and the Pacific.

Another aspect of the research is the recent exponential increase in the availability of digital sources as more material makes its way online. Although welcome, this research revolution brings with it challenges to the basic tenets of my historical training, which was based on being able to verify sources. My early research predates the digital age, although more recently I have taken full advantage of it. I have proceeded with care and cross-checked whenever I can, which has produced a plethora of new sources. For instance, the exact positions of nineteenth century pastoral stations are now far more easily locatable due to various digital geographic finding aids available online. In the 1970s, the only way to locate them was to use 1870s and 1880s printed sources, or through arduous searches in the Queensland State Archives.

All sources contain elements of bias and inaccuracy. I never take any source at face value. While I appreciate the amount of genealogical material and other online sources that now exists, they can involve poor judgements, particularly from keen untrained genealogists and local historians. Weighing up reliability against bulk, I am in favour of proceeding with care and accepting the democratisation of historical research processes. Oral testimony can also be quite flawed, but equally, any researcher knows that Government documents can be deliberately slanted and biased, and newspapers—now and in the nineteenth century—are

notorious for getting details wrong. It is the job of an historian to make judgements on all sources.

I have incorporated a few local linguistic peculiarities, which to the uninitiated may seem odd. The north side of the lower reaches of the river was always called the 'Northside', although the same style never extended to the south side of the river. And some geographic areas always had a 'The' attached in front: for instance, The Leap mountain just north of Mackay. Several pastoral station names always began with 'The': The Retreat, The Hollow, and The Pinnacle. The same applies to The Lagoons (now the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens in West Mackay), The Gooseponds in North Mackay, and The Cedars plantation. Some names have lost their prefixes: the rural area that was once La Habana plantation no longer has a 'La'; and Pinnacle, the town, has lost its 'The', which remains only on The Pinnacle mountain. The town of Finch Hatton has lost the hyphen in the Finch-Hatton family surname.

References and Style

My endeavours at consistency in style come out of recently publishing three books with the ANU Press. And after a lifetime of copious footnoting, I have freed myself from complex historical apparatus, limiting the number of endnotes to essentials, mainly references for quotations, relying instead on extensive bibliographies to position the chapters within the literature. This more relaxed style is now followed by many historians at the end of their careers and relies more on decades of accumulated knowledge gleaned from primary and secondary sources than on directly referenced sources. This will be sufficient verification for most readers. For those who want to research further, the chapter bibliographies await them. The sources of all photographs are acknowledged in the captions.

Units of Measurement

Perhaps because I was brought up using Imperial units of measurements, and as they were the system in use during the years covered in the book, I am in two minds about converting them into metric equivalents. However, the further we move in time from pounds and shillings, acres, and feet, towards dollars, hectares, and metres, the less the old units of measurement make sense to younger readers. References to mill rollers that were three or four feet wide seem to make more sense left in the Imperial size, rather than converted to metric equivalents. To assist modern readers, I have consistently converted miles to kilometres. On many occasions, when it is useful for clarity, I have used both measurement systems. A table of equivalence is provided below.

Distance
1 inch = 2.54 centimetres
12 inches = 1 foot
1 foot = 0.3048 meters
3 feet = 1 yard = 0.914 metres
1 mile = 1.60934 kilometres

Area
1 acre = 0.404 hectares
640 hectares = 1 square mile

1 square mile = 2.589 square kilometres

Currency
12 pence = 1 shilling
1 pound = $2

The monetary values vary largely in different decades. Usually, I have left the old currency as I found it, but on occasions a modern equivalent is provided. I have continued to use pounds sterling and shillings, and even guineas (£1.1s.) on two occasions, although when the amount is large, I have included an approximate modern equivalent. For instance, it makes little sense to mention £2,000 from 1865, unless we know that this is worth around $230,000 today. The conversion rates use Thom Blake's Historical Monetary Data for Australia. My thanks to Thom for creating such a useful resource: (www.thomblake.com.au/secondary/hisdata/query.php). However, as a general comment, I find all the conversions far too low. The best way to use the conversions is to look at the proportion of the inflation since the year specified.

Tons have not been converted to tonnes. The British ton used in the nineteenth century is equal to 2,240 pounds or 1,016 kilograms. The metric ton (tonne) now in common use (except in the USA) is equivalent to 1,000 kilograms. I have only used metric tonnes on a few occasions when quoting current sugar crop statistics. Weight measures, except tons, have been converted to the metric scale.

Final Thanks
Historians Glen Hall, Lyall Ford, Ross Johnston, Max Quanchi, and Brij Lal either read drafts of sections or provided advice. I also asked several people from the Mackay district for advice. Some have already been mentioned, and I would like to add Donnielle Fatnowna, Lola Forester, Marion Healy, Francis Bobongie-Harris, and Dennis Bobongie, who kindly read sections of the chapters.

When I offered this history of nineteenth century Mackay to the Mackay Historical Society and Museum, I asked for two things. First, that a website be created to house the manuscript, as well as showcasing other resources of the Society. The second request was that the final proof-reading be done by members of the Society. Thanks to Judy Stewart and Helen Martin, this was completed during 2022–23. My thanks to Danielle Jesser who created the website and was also involved in the initial proof-reading. Lyall Ford kindly proofread this revised 2024 edition. His excellent skills leave me in his debt. In this way, a sense of local ownership was achieved. In an increasingly digital world, which has made printed copies partly outmoded, it is hoped that *The River* shows a way forward for community history throughout Australia. I am responsible for the content and interpretations, and for any errors that have occurred. In 50 years of historical writing, I have never previously attempted anything as complex as this book. Finally, every author has personal peculiarities in style, to which I plead guilty. I hope that I have been consistent in my foibles. And occasionally the Microsoft Word programme we used created difficulties with the finer side of typesetting.

Clive Moore
Brisbane, October 2024

The Pioneer River in the Twenty-First Century, 2010s–2020s
A photograhic essay by Marion (née Fatnowna) Healy

Plate Intro.1: Flat Top and Round Top islands, the coastal sentinels marking the entrance to the Pioneer River. This view is from Far (Illawong) Beach. The original mouth of the river came along a channel opposite the beach before Cyclone Eline in 1898 straightened the entry point to the ocean. Neighbouring Town Beach began to be created once the old meander was cut off.

Plate Intro.2: Map 13.2 shows the area in 1862. Until 1898, beautiful Far (Illawong) Beach was part of west bank of the Pioneer River as it entered the ocean. It was renamed Illawong Beach some decades ago, although the old name remains in use. Mackay Airport is behind Far Beach and there is still a lagoon area connected to Shellgrit Creek which enters the ocean via the beach but is now contaminated by PFAS (toxic fire-fighting foam from the airport). The beach, backed by sand dunes, continues south to Baker's Creek. Between October and March marine turtles use the beach for nesting.

Plate Intro.3: This is Far (Illawong) Beach at low tide, looking south towards the coal-loading facilities at Hay Point. The tide recedes for several kilometres, and the sandy ocean floor is not stable, which is why attempts (see Chapter 13) to make Flat Top Island into a port facility connected to the mainland all failed. Also refer to Plate 13.13.

Plate Intro.4: The Forgan Bridge extends from Sydney Street to Cremorne. This photograph, taken from a drone, looks down River Street to the west. The first bridge on the site, known as the Sydney Street Bridge, was built between 1886 and 1889. The next bridge was opened in March 1938, and named after Mary Forgan, the mother of the Member for Mackay and former Premier Wiliam Forgan Smith. Construction of the third and present bridge commenced in May 2008 and was completed in August 2011.

Plate Intro.5: The new Forgan Bridge in Sydney Street, looking across the river to the Northside.

Plate Intro.6: Forgan Bridge from the riverbank, looking north-west. The Leichhardt tree, which was present in the 1860s, is still on the riverbank.

Plate Intro.7: Further towards the mouth of the river, looking back towards the city and Forgan Bridge.

Plate Intro.8: The Pioneer River, looking east from Forgan Bridge.

Plate Intro.9: The wharves on the Pioneer River, looking down-river towards the mouth.

Plate Intro.10: The W.R. Paxton & Co. building, built on the bank of the Pioneer River in River Street in 1899 and now demolished. The company was founded in 1876 as shipping agents, and a wholesale and retail hardware business.

Plate Intro.11: The Mackay Sugar Cubes (2009) sculpture by Fiona Foley, an Indigenous artist and one of Australia's most significant public art-makers. It consists of seven inward-leaning pillars each with twenty 300 cm cubes, constructed in aluminium, etched and paint filled. It was commissioned by the Mackay Regional Council and sits in Bluewater Quay, a riverbank park near Forgan Bridge, part of the Bluewater art trail. The sculpture reflects the site on the Pioneer River where 'Blackbirded' indentured Pacific Islander men, women and children were brought ashore. On the outward-facing side of the cubes are the names of some of the ships which transported the Islanders, and the names of the plantations where they worked. The backs of the lower cubes show thumb prints (provided by contemporary Australian South Sea Islanders), one of the Islander identification marks on arrival and used to signify exemption from deportation in the 1900s. This sculpture is close to a local landmark, the Leichhardt tree, which has been on the riverbank since the 1860s, connecting today's descendants to their ancestors. The sculpture is a powerful, challenging statement using contemporary art to convey contentious histories.

Plate Intro.12: This photograph was taken at the back of the Caneland Central shopping centre looking towards Mt Oscar in North Mackay during a flood in 2019. Plates 12 and 13 provide some idea of the size of the river when in flood.

Plate Intro.13: Another 2019 flood photograph taken from the back of Caneland Central shopping centre, looking across to North Mackay. Fifty-metre-high Mt Oscar is on the far right.

Plate Intro.14: An aerial photograph looking from North Mackay down to the mouth of the Pioneer River and towards the Outer Harbour. North Mackay is in the centre, The Goose Ponds are on the lower left, with Sams Road next to them in the lower centre.

Plate Intro.15: An aerial photograph of the northern side of the Pioneer River, showing the Edmund Casey Bridge, completed in 2009, which replaced the old Hospital Bridge, and the Queensland Rail Northern Line Bridge. The area was once home to River Estate and Foulden plantations.

Plate Intro.16: The Yuwi name for these lagoons on Nebo Road was Wambool and the largest lagoon was Kaliguil. They were a feasting area. Now known as The Lagoons, and since 2003 designated as the Mackay Regional Botanical Gardens, the area is joined by a creek to the Pioneer River. The Lagoons were used as a water supply for the town, as a recreation reserve onwards from 1870, and as a favoured home site for the villas of Mackay's elite.

Plate Intro.17: The Pioneer River has several weirs and dams: Marian Weir was built in 1952, followed soon after by Mirani Weir. Dumbleton Weir (pictured here) was built in 1982, 15 kilometres upstream of the river mouth, at the point where the saltwater stops, and the fresh water begins. Dumbleton Weir provides water for Mackay. It has been upgraded twice. In 1977, water from the Pioneer River was diverted into Kinchant Dam between Mirani and Eton on the upper reaches of Sandy Creek. Teemburra Dam was constructed in 1997, 50 kilometres west of Mackay at Pinnacle.

Plate Intro.18: The Pioneer River at Mirani showing the rail bridge from the road bridge, and Platypus Beach, a favourite weekend haunt for the locals. Even here, almost 40 kilometres upstream, the river is still substantial.

Plate Intro.19: Cattle Creek at Seninis Road off the Mackay-Eungella Road past Finch Hatton.

Plate Intro.20: Teemburra Dam was constructed in 1997, 50 kilometres west of Mackay close to the towns of Finch Hatton and Pinnacle. The dam is fed by Teemburra, Cedar and Pinnacle creeks, which via Black and Black Waterhole creeks feed into the Pioneer River flowing on the northern side of Mia Mai State Forest.

Plate Intro.21: Teemburra Dam, facing south-west toward Crediton State Forest, with Homevale National Park in the background.

Plate Intro.22: The western end of the Pioneer Valley. The photograph was taken from above Teemburra Dam, looking back over the small town of Pinnacle, with Pelion State Forest in the background. Mia Mia State Forest is south-east of the dam, with Crediton State Forest to the south-west.